

Albert Gallatin Jenkins: 20

# Civil War Ends Political Career

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** This is the 20th in a series of articles drawn from a biography of General Jenkins which Congressman Hechler is preparing. Readers are invited to supply additional details concerning lawyer-soldier-statesman Jenkins prior to the publication of the biographical volume. This is the last in the pre-Civil War series on General Jenkins.

By CONGRESSMAN KEN  
HECHLER

The 1859 re-election was a sweet one for Congressman Jenkins, and he was proud that his aged father, Captain William A. Jenkins, had survived to share this new success. As the summer of 1859 wore on, Captain Jenkins became weaker. The autumn leaves began to flutter in the Ohio Valley and Congressman Jenkins stayed close to home at Greenbottom because he knew that his father did not have long to live.

They buried the 82-year-old patriarch of the valley, the en-

terprising merchant captain of the deep, in a hillside grave near Greenbottom on Nov. 17, 1859. He was laid to rest next to his wife, Janetta, who although 27 years younger than Captain Jenkins had preceded him in death by over 16 years.

The life of Albert Gallatin Jenkins's father had been a truly remarkable one, spanning the entire history of America from one year after the Declaration of Independence until the eve of the Civil War. In later years, both Captain Jenkins and his wife, along with his sister, Mrs. Eustasia Jenkins Lacy (who died in 1873) were brought to Huntington and they are now resting in Spring Hill Cemetery along with the other members of the Jenkins family.

While the lights were flickering out for Captain Jenkins, the Congressman and his wife Virginia were preparing for a blessed event. Shortly after they returned to Washington, D. C., for the first session of the 36th Congress, on Jan. 29, 1860, Congressman and Mrs. Jenkins be-

came the parents of their first-born, James Bowlin Jenkins. Death and new birth within the space of a short time were symbolic.

## Somber Mood

The mood was somber when Congress convened on Dec. 15, 1859. Official Washington recognized the crisis was fast approaching. For almost two months, Congress was deadlocked as the House of Representatives tried to elect

speaker and no candidate received a majority. Congressman Jenkins for 36 ballots supported Thomas S. Bocock of Virginia for speaker, finally switching to a Whig candidate (William N. H. Smith of North Carolina) on the grounds that election of a "Black Republican" would be fatal to the South. Finally, on the 44th ballot, taken on Feb. 1, 1860 (when Congressman Jenkins's first-born was three days old), William Pennington of New Jersey was elected Speaker of the House of Representatives. Pennington was a Republican.

1860, the crucial year in which Abraham Lincoln was elected President of the United States,

was a year of trial for Albert Gallatin Jenkins. He was deeply worried about the future of the union. In a full-dress speech on April 26, 1860, Congressman Jenkins declared: "There is no denying the fact that we are rapidly approaching a crisis in the history of the Republic; a crisis which must culminate for weal or woe in a few brief months. . . . It was a political speech, attempting to keynote the dire dangers which would beset the nation if a Republican were elected President. Of course neither Jenkins nor anyone else could predict in the spring of 1860 that the law-boned lawyer from Illinois, who ran a poor second to William

H. Seward at the opening of the Republican convention, and who polled a minority of the popular vote in the general election would in fact be President and develop into one of the greatest Presidents America has ever known in any generation.

Congressman Jenkins was very active during the discussion of the tariff bill of 1860. In one striking address on May 8, 1860, he stated: "By reducing the duties upon luxuries, and increasing them upon necessities, you throw the whole burden of supporting the Government upon the laboring men. I propose to increase the duties upon luxuries, and diminish them upon articles of necessity."

## Tensions Rise

1860 faded into 1861. The inauguration of President Lincoln was approaching. The tempers and tensions in Congress between the northern and southern members rose. On Jan. 18, 1861, Congressman Jenkins introduced an amendment to the Army Appropriation Bill, providing that no money could be used to recapture any forts, arsenals or navy yards from states seceding from the Union. South Carolina had already started the parade of seceding states a month before. Other states were to follow.

The 36th Congress ground to a close. On March 1, 1861, Congressman Jenkins cast his last recorded vote. It was to allow Amos J. Williamson to collect \$1,000 for his time and mileage spent in an unsuccessful contest to unseat Congressman Dan Sickles of New York. On the evening of March 3, Congress came to an end and Jenkins' career as a Member of the United States Congress did likewise.

The states in the Deep South already had seceded from the Union. Jefferson Davis had al-

ready been installed as President of the Confederacy. But Virginia still went through the motions of a congressional election in the early spring of 1861 before hostilities actually broke out.

On March 28, the Democratic congressional nominating convention met again in Parkersburg. Congressman Jenkins carefully addressed to the convention on March 18 his desire not to run again, in these measured words:

"Gentlemen:

"In answer to numerous letters, as well as in conversation with various persons, I have uniformly expressed a desire not to be a candidate in the next election to represent this district in Congress; but to avoid all possible misunderstanding, I have thought it proper to communicate this to your body. Permit me, then, gentlemen, in making this announcement, to tender to you, as the representatives of those with whom I claim political fellowship, my grateful remembrance of the generous confidence extended to me in two former elections; and to assure you that in my retirement I shall carry with me an undying devotion to those principles of States Rights Democracy, whose success I have ever believed to be necessary to preserve the rights and liberties of the people.

I am, gentlemen,  
Your obedient servant,  
A. G. Jenkins."

The Jenkins letter, written

from Greenbottom, was mailed to the Parkersburg convention. Although every word was meant seriously because Congressman Jenkins realized events could scarcely allow a regular elec-

tion, several convention delegates immediately expressed the opinion that, notwithstanding Jenkins's declination, the nomination should be tendered by acclamation. This was immediately done.

## War Begins

Only a few days elapsed after the Parkersburg Convention before the world-shaking event which wiped out any chance for Virginia to send representatives to the United States Congress. In the cold, gray dawn of April 12, 1861, the match was touched to the dynamite of war by the firing on Fort Sumter. A few days later Virginia had seceded from the Union. The birth of the state of West Virginia was only a little more than two years off.

The outbreak of Civil War closed the book on another phase of the fabulous life of Albert Gallatin Jenkins. Henceforth, the life of this brilliant son of Cabell County was devoted to fighting for the cause he believed to be just. In that cause he fell mortally wounded at the Battle of Cloyd's Mountain in 1864, but not before establishing a reputation as one of the outstanding cavalry generals of the Civil War.

(This concludes the series of articles by Congressman Hechler on the peace-time career of Albert Gallatin Jenkins. In a subsequent series, Congressman Hechler will trace the wartime exploits of General Jenkins.)